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LENS 5

**Purpose:** Inform that life isn’t always easy and there are many obstacles

**Genre:** Essay

**Audience:** teachers

**Engagement:** Tell readers that they can relate to the story and picking out quotes that I think are most important

*Out of the Dust*- Reader Response

When I first started reading this book, I didn’t like it and I thought it was going to take me forever to read this story. Usually, I don’t like reading books that act like diaries. I like books that have a climax, even though I’m not saying this book doesn’t, but I mainly don’t pick ones that are about things from history. This book teaches us that life isn’t always a joyride. We all experience pain, suffering, loss, a sense of not knowing who we are. Even though we experience these unfortunate events, there is always a time where something good happens and you are happy for the first time in a while.

I would recommend this book to teachers so they can have their students read it. Like I stated in the beginning, there were many things that the students can relate to that happened to Billy Jo, the little girl in the story. First of all, her family was living during hard times. The location that they lived in had dust storms all the time and it was difficult to grow any produce in order to make money. “One quarter of te wheat is lost: blown away or withered up. What remains is little more than a wisp of what it should be. And every day we have no rain, more wheat dies” (p. 39). The students might not live in these types of conditions, but their family life could be very similar. With the economy today, more families are struggling to make ends meet and provide for their families. If the teacher is at a school where there are many students who have a low SES, they can really relate to this family.

Another aspect in this story that is relatable to everyone is loss of a family member. Billy Jo lost two family members right after another. Her mother died while she was giving birth to her baby brother and he died not too long afterwards. She was only fourteen years old when this tragic moment happened. This isn’t an easy age to go through without a mother, especially for a girl. She feels lost without her mother, especially since she can’t play the piano the way she used to. Her mother taught her to play, but since she burned her hands she can’t be a part of the memory that she want to keep close to her mother. Not only is going through a hard time dealing with her mother’s loss, her father is going through a tougher time. She felt lost, since her father wasn’t paying attention to her or realized that she was around. “He is rotting away, like his father, ready to leave me behind in the dust. Well, I’m leaving first” (p. 196). Some students might think that running away from their problems is the right thing to do. However, it could make things worse and it might be worse somewhere else. Billy Jo realized that she needed to be home with her father and that she couldn’t make it on her own.

The last thing that this book can teach students is to realize that things can turn around and be better. The best quote that sums this up is, “And I know now that all the time I was trying to get out of the dust, the fact is, what I am, I am because of the dust. And what I am is good enough. Even for me” (p. 222). Billy Jo’s life is finally turning around and she is finding her place in life. She knows that living in the dust is her life and she is finally accepting the things that happened to her. She is playing the piano again, and even her father found something that might be a good mother figure to Billy Jo. Things happen that we aren’t prepared for, but we have to remember not to look in the past, but to look ahead. Teachers can teach students to make the best out of life and know that everyone goes through hard times at some point in their life.